OECD

PISA IN FOCUS 50

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Do teacher-student relations affect students' well-being at school?

- Four out of five students in OECD countries agree or strongly agree that they feel happy at school or that they feel like they belong at school.
- Teacher-student relations are strongly associated with both performance in mathematics and students' happiness and sense of belonging at school.
- On average across OECD countries, 71% of students attend schools whose principals reported that teachers value the social and emotional development of their students as much as their students' academic proficiency.

Children spend about a third of their waking hours in school during most weeks in the year. Thus, schools have a significant impact on children's quality of life – including their relationships with peers and adults, and their dispositions towards learning and life more generally. Longitudinal studies suggest that students' results on the PISA test are correlated with how well students will do later on in life; but strong performance in standardised assessments like PISA explains only so much of future results in other endeavours. Success and well-being in life also depend on how well students have been able to develop socially and emotionally.

Students are more likely to be happy at school…

For the first time, PISA 2012 asked students to evaluate their happiness at school. As schools are *a*, if not *the*, primary social environment for 15-year-olds, these subjective evaluations provide a good indication of whether education systems are able to foster or undermine overall student well-being. On average, students reported feeling happy at school. Across OECD countries, 80% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel happy at school". The proportion of students who reported being happy at school was largest in Albania, Indonesia and Peru and smallest in the Czech Republic, Korea and the Slovak Republic. Students in Belgium, Hong Kong-China, Japan, Liechtenstein, Shanghai-China, Singapore, Switzerland and Chinese Taipei reported above-average levels of happiness at school while displaying above-average performance in mathematics.

How can education systems best support teachers, school principals and families in their efforts to promote both academic performance and healthy social and emotional development among students? Is academic success intrinsically linked with stress and, as a result, less enjoyment of learning?

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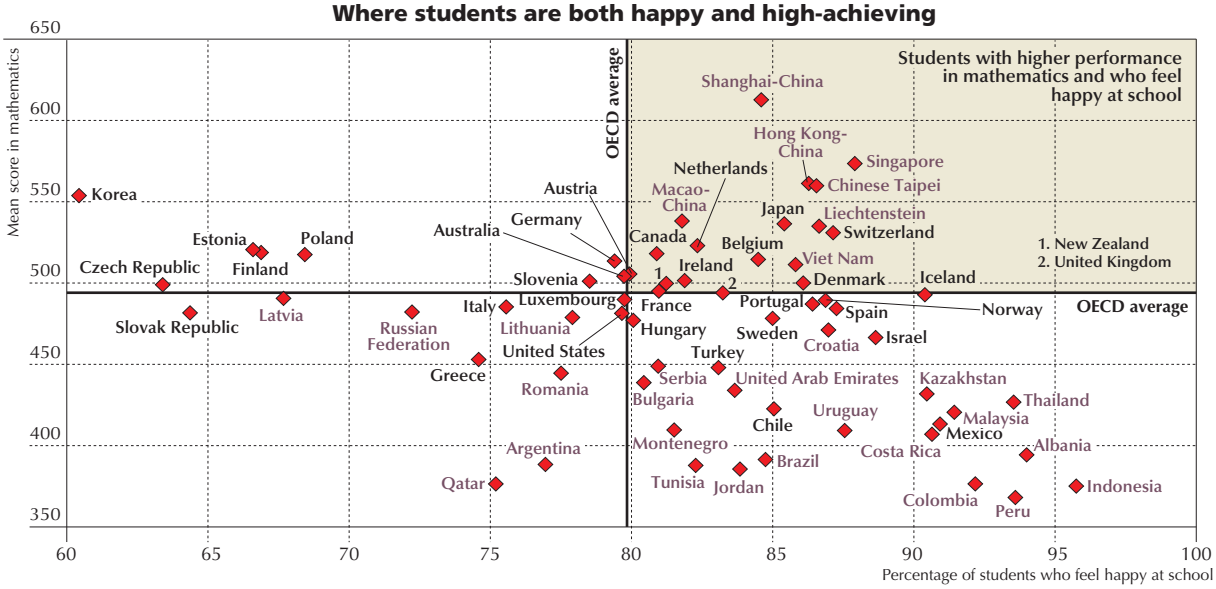
...when they have good relations with their teachers.

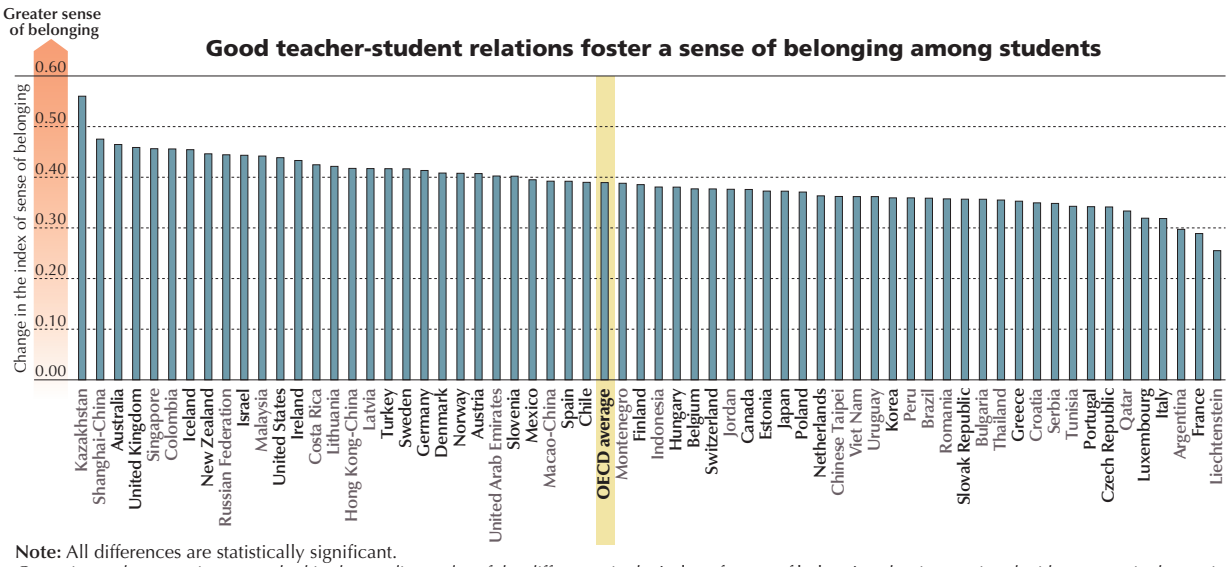
PISA suggests that positive and constructive teacher-student relations are associated with better performance in mathematics – and can be a key vehicle through which schools can foster the social and emotional well-being of students. On average across OECD countries, when comparing students with similar socio-economic backgrounds and performance in mathematics, students who reported that they enjoy good relations with their teachers (e.g. they get along with most of their teachers; most teachers are interested in their well-being; most teachers really listen to what they have to say; they will receive extra help from their teachers, if needed; and most teachers treat them fairly) were more likely to report that they are happy at school, that they make friends easily at school, that they feel like they belong, and that they are satisfied with their school. They are also less likely to report that they feel lonely at school, or that they feel like an outsider or awkward and out of place in school.

Where students are both happy and high-achieving



Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database, Table I.2.3a and Figure III.1.2.
StatLink http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932935667 • StatLink http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932963787

Good teacher-student relations foster a sense of belonging among students



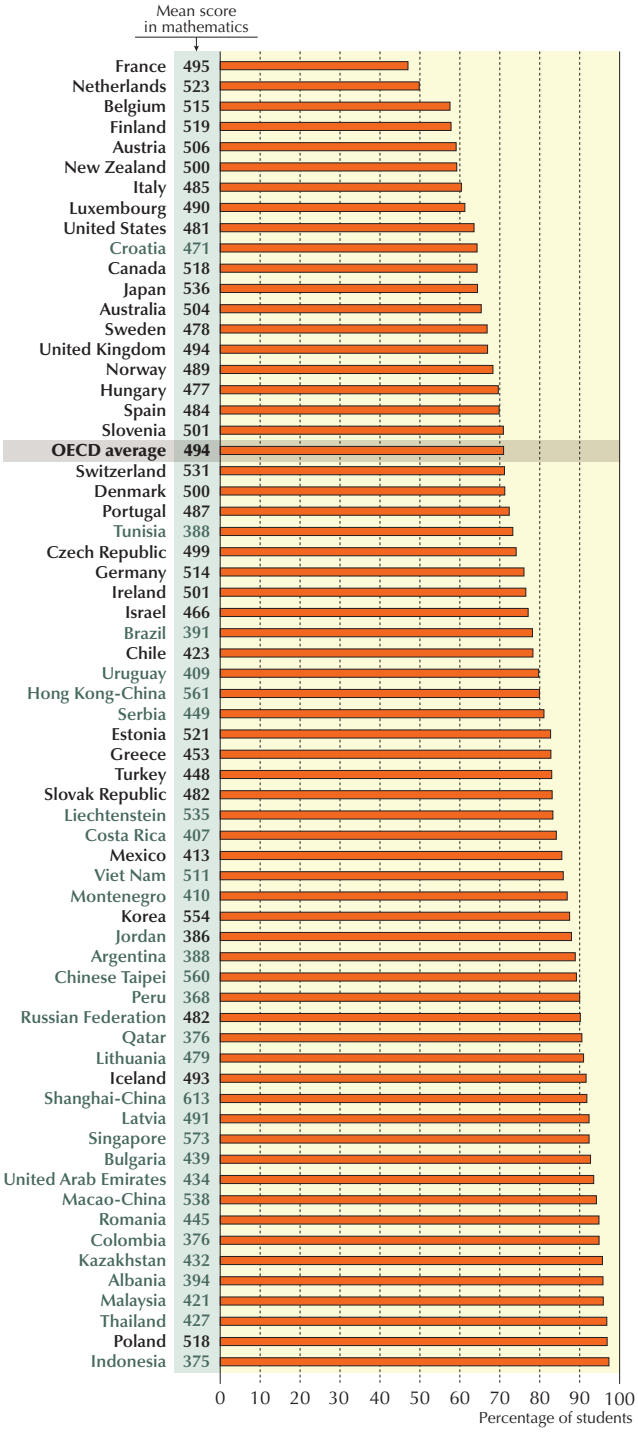
Note: All differences are statistically significant.
Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the difference in the index of sense of belonging *that is associated with a one-unit change in the* index of teacher-student relations *after accounting for differences in students' socio-economic status and performance in mathematics.*
Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database, Table III.5.19.
StatLink http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932963996

In schools with better teacher-student relations, students were also less likely to report that they arrived late for school or skipped classes or days of school during the two weeks prior to the PISA test. For example, in all countries and economies except Hong Kong-China, Indonesia, Liechtenstein and Malaysia, among students who were similarly proficient in mathematics and came from similar socio-economic backgrounds, students who attended schools where relations between teachers and students were better were less likely to have reported that they arrived late during the two weeks before the PISA test. In Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Kazakhstan, Korea, Poland, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland, this difference is particularly large – five percentage points or more.

School is about more than acquiring subject-specific knowledge.

PISA data reveal that most students are in schools where teachers believe that the social and emotional development of their students is as important as the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge and skills. School principals who responded to the PISA 2012 school background questionnaire were asked whether they agreed that mathematics teachers in their school consider the social and emotional development of students to be as important as students' mastery of mathematics skills and knowledge. This question aims to determine the extent to which school principals in participating countries and economies feel that the objective of helping students develop socially and emotionally is as valued by a group of teachers as the development of subject-specific skills and competencies.

Where students' well-being is considered to be as important as academic achievement



Note: The figure shows the percentage of students who are in schools whose principal agrees or strongly agrees that there is a consensus among mathematics teachers that the social and emotional development of students is as important as students' acquisition of mathematical skills and knowledge in class.
Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the percentage of students who are in schools where there is a consensus on the importance of the social and emotional development of students.
Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database, Figure III.1.1.
StatLink http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932963787

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Overall, most students in PISA-participating countries and economies are in schools whose principals believe that the social and emotional development of their students is as valued by mathematics teachers in their school as the acquisition of mathematics skills. On average across OECD countries, 71% of students attend schools whose principals reported so. However, the OECD average masks large differences among countries and economies. Specifically, this percentage tends to be lower in OECD countries than it is in both high- and low-achieving partner countries and economies. Iceland and Poland are the only OECD countries where over 90% of students attend schools whose principal believes that the social and emotional development of their students is as valued by mathematics teachers in their school as the acquisition of mathematics skills. In as many as 6 OECD countries, fewer than 60% of students attend such schools.

The bottom line: Academic achievement that comes at the expense of students' well-being is not a full accomplishment. PISA finds that most teachers and principals acknowledge that the socio-emotional development of their students is as important as mastery of school subjects. Good teacher-student relations play an important role in that development – and in students' attitudes towards learning. When students have good relations with their teachers, both their performance and their sense of belonging at school benefit.

For more information

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See OECD (2013), *PISA 2012 Results: Ready to Learn (Volume III): Students' Engagement, Drive and Self-Beliefs*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris.

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